

WALLS THAT DIVIDE

EPH 2:11-22

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ST. PAUL'S DUVAL & PRINCE OF PEACE GOVAN¹

The deeper you move into the heart of a city, the more it seems that people seem to value their privacy.

The deeper you go into a city, the more blinds are drawn, the taller the fences seem to get, the less people talk to each other. Doors are always locked. People guard their homes with dogs and alarm systems.

On March 13, 1964, Kitty Genovese returned home from work in Queens, N.Y. She was stalked by man who stabbed her. She screamed out, "Oh, my God, he stabbed me! Please help me! Please help me!"

One man even opened his window and shouted out, "Let that girl alone!" The attack began at 3:15 am. The first call to police was over half an hour later.

Police went door to door the next day. They found 38 people who witnessed the attack but nobody was even embarrassed for not calling police or getting involved. Everyone seemed afraid of getting involved in something that wasn't any of their business.²

Perhaps this is all necessary. We live in a violent world. We need to lock our doors because we don't know

¹ This sermon is based on a sermon preached February 25, 1986 at a Lenten Service at St. Mark's Anglican Church in Rosslyn, Ontario, that being my first sermon to an Anglican community.

² Albrecht, Stan L., Darwin L. Thomas & Bruce A Chadwick, *Social Psychology*. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ. 1980. p. 283-284.

http://www.crimelibrary.com/serial_killers/predators/kitty_genovese/

who are the nice people and who are the ones who are trying to steal from us or assault our families.

We are cautious because we need to feel secure. And it is because of this need for security that we end up building walls around ourselves.

These walls can't help but divide us from each other. Deep in the city, neighbour no longer knows neighbour because everyone has built up a wall that divides.

But of course, it's not just the large cities that have walls. This past week, Statistics Canada reported that Saskatchewan is the most violent province in Canada. Regina is the second most violent city while Saskatoon is tied for third.³

We also think of the small town of Spiritwood that was the focus of a massive dragnet for Curtis Dagenais following the shooting deaths of RCMP Constables Robin Cameron and Marc Bourdages. There is a town with very big walls as a result of their tragedy and fear.

And the walls are not just out there. We have big walls as well. As Lutherans, our ancestors came to this country as Germans and Scandinavians. There aren't many people named "Smith" or "Jones" or "Stonechild" attending our Lutheran churches. We don't have many people from African, Chinese, Vietnamese, East Indian or aboriginal roots. We don't find it easy to invite needy people to our church. We don't like to talk to people we don't know and we avoid meeting people who might just ask us for a favour, or a dollar for a cup of coffee or a free meal. We like the walls we hide behind. They make us feel safe and secure.

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<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/saskatchewan/story/2006/07/20/crimesask.html>

One of my American cousins went through Eastern Europe trying to order a Coors Light everywhere she went. She refused to speak any German, not even “Danke,” “Guten Tag”, or “Tschus.” Her attitude seemed to be that as an American, others should adopt her culture and language.

Walls also keep us from enjoying life and experiencing the richness of each other. With our walls cemented in place, we cannot appreciate each other’s cultures and traditions. We are locked into seeing life from one perspective. We can’t respect each other. We can’t grow to become all that we can be; we can’t grow as people of God.

We must tear down the walls that divide.

Teenagers, my own included, claim that their parents just don’t understand them; that their parents don’t listen to them.

In a university study, I once asked teenagers how much time they spend at home with their families in a week: they replied, “About 20 hours.” Then I asked them how many of these 20 hours were spent in front of the TV. “About 18 hours.”

Then I talked to parents about their teenage children, they complained that they just don’t understand kids these days. They asked why kids don’t respect their elders.

They would say things like, “When I was young, I never in my life did that!”

And I would say, “Oh really? How much time do you spend every week with your children.”

And they would say, “About 20 hours!”

Looking at my own kids and the time we spend together, I think those 2 hours have now shrunk to under 30 minutes.

In our homes and families, many walls divide. Television is one of them.

20 years ago, in 1986, I remember hearing a story of 2 Anglican deaconesses who came out of the closet and confessed to being lesbians. We’ve been playing out this issue for over 20 years now and we still can’t get past the walls the divide homosexuals from heterosexuals.

Because we cannot understand what would allow someone to be homosexual, we put up walls to keep it out of our churches. We build a wall that divides.

There are hundreds of examples of these walls around us: American from terrorist, (except that to much of the world it is the Americans that bring the terror), Socialist from Conservative, Christian from Muslim, Israeli from Arab, Native from White, Rich from Poor, us from them.

We are always building up walls that divide.

The reason is always the same: we build walls to protect ourselves from the things we don’t understand, from the things we fear.

We build up walls to make us feel good, to say that we are right and it is the people on the other side of the wall that are wrong.

We build up walls to say that if those people on the outside would just become like us, then maybe we’d let them come inside too. (Well, no, not really, but we like to think that we would.)

When we build up walls between white and native, we end up feeling that our lifestyle is the correct one and it is the natives that must clean up their act.

When we build up walls between parents and children, understanding ends and fighting begins.

When we build up walls between gays and heterosexuals, we can convince ourselves that homosexuality is the unforgivable sin and that compared to homosexuality, all our sins are pale in comparison.

But all sin is equal, and all of us are equally sinful. All sin is condemned, and so all of us are equally forgiven.

These walls we create are illusions.

The early Christians did the same thing we do; they built up walls that divide. There were Jewish Christians and there were Gentile Christians. Neither would worship with the other. After all, for a Jew to sit with a Gentile was to defile himself.

Paul tells us in our reading from Ephesians, that through Christ, we are “no longer strangers and aliens,” but instead we are fellow citizens and family (v. 19).

I want to leave you this morning with a wonderful story of how these walls *can* come down.

On Tuesday morning, Rosanne Smith was driving her husband, Armand, out to their hay field. Thinking he saw a porcupine, Armand actually found Curtis Dagenais hiding in the swaths.⁴

For most people, meeting Canada’s dangerous and most wanted fugitive face to face is normally a time we build walls.

But something in Armand and Rosanne led them to tear down those walls. Instead they talked to the accused cop killer. They talked and they talked. They invited him home for coffee and a sandwich. And they talked some more.

Curtis asked Rosanne for a hug and Rosanne obliged. And they talked some more.

They talked for six hours before Curtis agreed to turn himself in. Armand and Rosanne drove him to the police detachment, and went inside and told police that Curtis Dagenais was going to give himself up.

In a radio interview, Armand says that he never wants to go through that again. It wasn’t easy or pleasant for him. But somehow, because he could tear down the walls instead of building them up, this entire story has a peaceful ending: not a shot was fired, not a gun was drawn, not another life was endangered.

God wants to tear down sin. She wants to tear down the walls that divide. He wants to break down the walls that we put up.

God wants to open up the barriers we erect between others and ourselves and instead help us to live and grow in peace and harmony.

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<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/saskatchewan/story/2006/07/19/dagenais-court.html>

http://www.cbc.ca/clips/rm-newsworld/smith_invu060719.rm